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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

26 April 1985

Soviet Airstrikes in Pakistan: Options and Effectiveness [redacted]

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Summary

The Soviets have the capability to increase their air attacks against Afghan resistance targets in Pakistan. We believe that intensified airstrikes against insurgent supply lines across the border or air attacks on guerrilla training camps and arms depots in the border area would have only a limited impact on the war in Afghanistan. The destruction of small arms depots close to the border probably would result in regional disruptions in supplies for some insurgent groups in Afghanistan, but the effect would be only temporary. [redacted]

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We do not believe Pakistan would be intimidated by stepped up cross-border airstrikes against resistance targets so long as it was confident of US support. We do not expect the Soviets to attack Pakistani military targets because of the risk of a US response, nor do we believe they would bomb the refugee camps because of the likely international outcry. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Pakistan/Afghanistan/Bangladesh Branch, South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Information as of 26 April 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, South Asia Division, [redacted]

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Background

Soviet military pressure on Pakistan increased significantly following Moscow's warning to Islamabad last summer to end its support for the Afghan resistance. Since July 1984 [redacted] nearly 60 Soviet or Afghan airstrikes into Pakistani territory--about half of them since January--as well as a similar number of airspace violations that did not involve bombing or rocket attacks. The airstrikes have been confined to Pakistan's border regions, typically have involved four to six aircraft, and have lasted less than 15 minutes. [redacted]

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We believe nearly all of the air attacks were directly related to Soviet and Afghan Army attempts to relieve resistance pressure on Afghan border outposts or to interdict insurgent supply lines across the border. Most of the reported incidents were around the Pakistani border towns of Arandu, where the Konar River flows into Afghanistan, and Teri Mangal, in the Parachinar area. Both towns are opposite Afghan Army border outposts that have long been besieged by the insurgents and are astride major insurgent infiltration routes into Afghanistan. [redacted]

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The Soviets probably also hoped to press Islamabad to reduce its support for the Afghan guerrillas. Pakistan, however, is unlikely to reverse its Afghanistan policy because of increased Soviet cross-border airstrikes unless Islamabad believed US support was weakening or the Zia regime was replaced by a government less sympathetic to the Afghan resistance and more willing to reach a political accommodation with Moscow and Kabul. [redacted]

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Soviet Capabilities for Increased Cross-Border Airstrikes

The Soviets have the capability to escalate cross-border airstrikes without strengthening their air forces in Afghanistan. Soviet air forces in Afghanistan include some 25 SU-25 attack planes, 45 SU-17 fighter-bombers, and 45 MIG-23 fighters. In addition, the Afghan Air Force has some 30 SU-17/22 fighter-bombers and 40 MIG-21 fighters at airbases in eastern and southern Afghanistan. [redacted]

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Besides intensifying their attacks on guerrilla supply lines across the border, the Soviets might choose to target insurgent arms depots and training camps inside Pakistan. They would be less likely to systematically bomb Afghan refugee camps or Pakistani military targets because of the likely international outrage and greater risk of a major military confrontation with Pakistan that could involve the United States. We believe that frequent Soviet reconnaissance flights along the border have helped the Soviets to locate insurgent targets in Pakistan, as well as to monitor Pakistani forces. [redacted]

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Prospects for Success

We believe that an escalation of Soviet airstrikes against insurgent bases and logistics in Pakistan would have little impact on the war in Afghanistan. The potential targets in Pakistan are small and dispersed and, in many cases, cannot be distinguished from Pakistani villages or paramilitary and Army facilities. Air attacks might force the insurgents to use alternative, less desirable supply routes into Afghanistan and to relocate

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training camps and arms depots in Pakistan, but they could sustain the resistance with only minor disruptions. [REDACTED]

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Airstrikes against insurgent arms depots in Pakistan would result in only temporary regional disruptions in supplies for guerrillas in Afghanistan. Arms depots for individual insurgent groups that are close to the border are used principally for the transit of arms into Afghanistan, and their destruction would not result in appreciable losses of weapons and ammunition because large supplies are not kept there. Centralized storage depots for the Afghan resistance--where the bulk of insurgent arms and ammunition are stockpiled--are much farther from the border, and the Soviets would have to consider the risk of a Pakistani or US response to an attack. [REDACTED]

Pakistani Capabilities

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Pakistan has a limited capability to defend against Soviet or Afghan air incursions in the border area:

- The Pakistanis have poor radar coverage of the border, and their air defense system is poorly integrated, making it difficult for the Air Force to intercept attacking aircraft.
- The Pakistan Air Force has only some 65 obsolescent Chinese fighters based opposite Afghanistan.
- Pakistan's F-16s are based closer to the border with India and cannot respond quickly from there to air incursions along the border with Afghanistan.
- Pakistani ground forces in the area are not equipped with modern anti-aircraft weapons. [REDACTED]

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